DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 189 465 CE 026 187

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TITLE Do Men and Women Work for the Same Reasons? Job Attribute Preferences and Work Commitment.
SPONS AGENCY Kentucky Univ., Lexington. Agricultural Experiment Station.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 21p.; Portions of this paper were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society (March 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; Economic Factors; Educational Background; Employed Women; Employment Level; Employment Patterns; *Females; Income; *Influences; Job Satisfaction; *Males; National Surveys; *Sex Differences; Vocational Interests; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Utilizing data from four representative national samples, a study was conducted to explore the extent of assumed sex differences in preferences for work attributes and commitment to continuing labor force participation. The results indicated only minimal differences between males and females. Both sexes identified meaningfulness of the work as the most important job attribute and rank ordered the other four job attributes studied in the same sequence. Although income, education, and occupational prestige influenced preferences for job attributes, they did not affect the general findings of similar preferences among males and females. In addition, a majority of both sexes indicated a commitment to work regardless of economic necessity. Married women, however, reported slightly greater preferences for meaningful work, less interest in job security, and less willingness to continue working if economically unnecessary. (Implications of the findings are discussed.) (Author/BM)

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CN003340

ED189465

DO MEN AND WOMEN WORK FOR THE SAME REASONS? JOB ATTRIBUTE PREFERENCES AND WORK COMMITMENT

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Portions of this paperwere presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, March 1980. The data for this paper were provided by the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. We wish to thank Dr. Laura R. Lacy for her editorial assistance and Marlene Pettit for her secretarial assistance. The research was supported in part by the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station (Journal paper No. 80-14-140 Project No. 830).

CE026187

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DO MEN AND WOMEN WORK FOR THE SAME REASON?
JOB ATTRIBUTE PREFERENCES AND WORK COMMITMENT

ABSTRACT

The extent of assumed sex differences in 1) preferences for work attributes, and 2) commitment to continuing labor force participation is explored utilizing data from four representative national samples. The results indicated only minimal differences between males and females. Both sexes identified meaningfulness of the work as the most important job attribute, and rank ordered the other four job attributes studied in the same sequence. Although income, education and occupational prestige influenced preferences for job attributes, they did not affect the general findings of similar preferences among males and females. In addition, a majority of both sexes indicated a commitment to work regardless of economic necessity. Married women, however, reported slightly greater preferences for meaningful work, less interest in job security and less willingness to continue working if economically unnecessary. Implications of the findings are discussed.

SEP 2 1980

DO MEN AND WOMEN WORK FOR THE SAME REASONS?
JOB ATTRIBUTE PREFERENCES AND WORK COMMITMENT

It has long been assumed that men and women have different reasons for working (Crowley, et al., 1973; Jurgenson, 1947; Laws, 1976). Men are said to work primarily to fulfill a central life interest, and secondarily to provide for their families. On the other hand, women enter the labor force merely to supplement their family's income. Consequently, it is assumed that men value career-oriented job attributes (e.g., responsibility, promotion, opportunities to use one's skills), whereas women value socio-emotional and hygienic job attributes (e.g., coworker congeniality, work environment and working hours.) Therefore, it has been suggested that different motivational and reward strategies, as well as different types of supervision should be effective for men and women. This paper explores the conventional wisdom regarding work and the sexes by examining the extent of sex-related differences in preferences for job attributes and commitment to work.

Literature Review

Sex Differences?

Past research on sex differences in work attitudes and in preference for job attributes has produced mixed and inconsistent results (Brief & Aldag, 1975, Schuler 1975; Sauser & York, 1978; Quinn, et al., 1974). Herzberg, et al. (1957), for example, found that males place more importance on job content or intrinsic factors than females. Subsequent studies have found that women generally place more importance on extrinsic factors, such as work

environment and interpersonal relationships, while men prefer intrinsic or career factors, such as self-expression, long-term career objectives, and influencing decisions (Manhardt, 1972; Bartol, 1974; Jurgenson, 1947, 1978; Schuler,1975; Centers & Bugental, 1966; Bartol & Manhardt, 1979). In general, however, these differences were small and explained little of the variance.

In addition, researchers interpreted these mixed results differently; some emphasized sex differences, others stressed the similarities. When Schuler (1975) found no sex differences on five of eight job attributes, he emphasized the differences on the other three work attributes. On the other hand, when Centers and Bugental (1966) found sex differences on two of six job attributes, they concluded that "no sex differences were found in the value placed on intrinsic or extrinsic factors in general" (p. 193).

In contrast, other studies have reported no differences in preference for intrinsic or extrinsic job attributes, particularly when factors such as educational and occupational level were controlled (Brief, et al., 1977; Burke, 1966; Brief & Oliver,1976). Saleh and Lalljee (1969), found that sex differences in job attribute preferences were eliminated when age, job level and education were controlled. Brief and Aldag (1975), controlling on occupation and occupational level with two samples of low income, non-white individuals, found no support for sex differences in job attribute preferences. Each of these researchers questioned whether sex per se was the critical factor in explaining work attitude differences. In short, these studies highlighted similarities between male and female workers, and concluded that under similar conditions men and women seek similar outcomes from their jobs.

Limitations of Past Research

One important limitation of previous research is the omission of marital status as an intervening variable. Only a few studies acknowledge the possible importance of this variable (Jurgensen, 1978; Crowley, et al., 1973). Jurgensen noted that for men there were differences in job attribute preferences between single men and all other marital statuses, but these were probably due to the young age of most single men. For women there was little difference between single and married women, but an increase in importance of advancement, benefits and security among those no longer married. Crowley, et al. (1973) examined sex differences regarding work as a central life interest and found that sex differences were explained, in part, by the differences between married and unmarried women. Most unmarried women and men were similar in indicating high commitment to work, whereas married women were more likely to prefer not working if economically unncessary. The authors suggest that these differences may be the result of socially approved alternatives to work for the married women (role of wife and mother) which are not available to the unmarried women. Married women, unlike males and unmarried females, may not derive their primary identity and status from their occupation, nor emphasize their jobs as a vehicle for obtaining life goals (Miller, et al., 1979). In addition married women may experience role conflicts because of the difficulty they have in shedding the role of housewife and mother. This conflict may arise 1) because of the incompatibility between the woman's self perception of her role and the role relevant others demand and 2) because taking on additional roles may create role overload (Terborg, 1977). Consequently, marital status may constitute an important dimension in preferences for job attributes and commitment to work.

In addition, research on sex differences in work attitudes has been hampered by samples limited in terms of size, range of occupational categories, number of organizations or firms, or narrow geographical area. Consequently, these studies have marginal generalizability. Since this research utilizes four large representative national samples of the U.S. population its results can be generalized to the U.S. population with greater confidence.

Moreover, previous studies have failed to analyze more than two or three control variables. For example, Brief, et al., (1977) in one of the few studies utilizing national data, reduced the sample size to 314 and controlled for only occupational status. Importantly, this research explores the effects of education, occupational prestige, income and age on the sex-related differences in preferences for job attributes.

Finally, longitudinal analyses are rarely used to examine the changes and stability of sex differences in worker attitudes. Exceptions to this generalization are Bartol and Manhardt (1979) and Jurgenson (1978). This study,on the other hand, examines the pattern of sex-related differences in preferences over a five-year period, 1973-1977.

Research Questions

First, this study analyzes sex-related differences in preferences for a number of job attributes: working hours, income, promotion, job security, and intrinsic meaning. We expect that men and women, particularly those who are unmarried, will express similar preferences. Second, we consider the broader question of a worker's commitment to work as a central life interest by asking whether an individual would continue working if she/he did not need the money. We hypothesize that men and unmarried women will respond

similarly, while married women will be less committed to working if economically unncessary. In examining these relationships occupation, income, education and age, will be introduced as controls. Finally, the relationship between sex and these attributes will be examined over a five-year span during the 1970's.

METHODS

This study of sex differences in work attitudes utilizes data from four national samples gathered as part of the General Social Survey between 1973 and 1977 (N = 5880). Each year the survey consisted of an independently drawn sample of English-speaking persons 18 years of age or over, living in noninstitutional arrangements within the continental United States. A combination of probability and block quota sampling techniques were employed by the National Opinion Research Center to provide a representative national sample.

All information was gathered in an hour interview in response to a wide range of issues as recommended by a panel of social scientists. Preferences for job attributes were measured by asking:

> "Here are a list of five things about a job:
> a) high income
> b) no danger of being fired (security)
> c) working hours are short, lots of free time
> d) chances for advancement (promotion)
> e) work important and gives a feeling of accomplishments (meaningful)
> Please tell me which one thing from this list you would most prefer in a job. Which comes next? Which is third most important? Which is fourth?"

Commitment to work was assessed by asking the subjects who were currently working or temporarily not at work:

> If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would continue to work or would you stop working?

In examining sex differences in work attitudes, it was suggested

that selected demographic characteristics could affect the relationship. Therefore, several factors were utilized as control variables and measured in the following manner (for additional information see Davis, 1978): current marital status: married, lost spouse (widowed, divorced, separated) or never been married; occupational prestige: the two digit 1960 Hodge-Siegel-Rossi Prestige Score; family income: 12 categories from under $1,000 to $25,000 or over; education: highest grade that respondent finished and received credit from no formal schooling to 8 years of college; age: self-reported birth date, converted to actual age.

RESULTS

Minimal differences between men and women existed in the analysis of preferences for the five job attributes. The Pearson correlation between sex and the job attribute preferences were all less than $r = .10$ (income, $r = .02$ n.s.; security $r = .05$, $p < .01$; working hours, $r = .03$ n.s.; promotions, $r = -.01$ n.s.; work meaningful, $r = -.08$, $p < .01$). The ranking of preferred job characteristics was similar for men and women. Both were most likely to prefer work that was important and meaningful and gave one a feeling of accomplishment (Table 1). Approximately half the respondents indicated this was their highest preference, with women slightly, but significantly ($p < .01$), more likely to identify this attribute. Income and promotion were the job attributes next most preferred by both males and females, with approximately a fifth of each group selecting these job characteristics. Both sexes infrequently choose job security and working hours as the most important criterion for a job, with men slightly more likely ($p < .01$) to choose job security as most important.

Previous research has demonstrated the effect of several structural

and demographic factors, such as occupation, education and income, on preferences for particular job attributes. An analysis of the relationship between these factors and preferences for job attributes confirmed previously reported findings. For example, the higher one's occupational prestige, education and income, the higher the preference for meaningful and important work ($r = .26$, $r = .29$, $r = .15$, respectively, $p < .01$). Similarly, the lower one's occupational prestige, education and income, the higher the concern for job security ($r = .18$, $r = .23$, $r = .16$, respectively, $p < .01$). Other preferences were not significantly affected by these factors. However, the previously reported pattern of preferences for men and women generally remain consistent across categories of occupational prestige, education and income. While it is true that persons with higher levels of occupational prestige, education and income are more likely to prefer meaningful work and deemphasize job security and income, the same rank order of attribute preferences exists for both men and women in each category. In addition, the slight differences between men and women on the preference for meaningful work and job security hold regardless of these factors (Table 1).

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

Next, the effect of marital status on the relationship between sex and job attribute preferences was examined. The preferences of men and women, regardless of marital status, were generally similar. For men there were no significant differences among the various marital status categories. However there were some slight but significant differences for women. First, married women were more likely to seek meaningful work (55.3%) than men and all other marital categories of women, except those who were never married. Second, women who had never been married (on the average a young

age group, a majority of whom will marry) were slightly less concerned about income and slightly more interested in promotions than other women and men. Finally, those women who had lost their husbands (widowed, divorced or separated) were slightly more interested in income as an important attribute of work. The slight differences between men and women were accounted for primarily by the responses of married women (Table 2).

(TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE)

The next analysis concerned the possibility of changing attitudes regarding work. It has been proposed that, in particular, women's preferences for job attributes may have been changing in recent years. The seventies, for example, have been characterized by substantial interest in alternative careers for women, as well as passage and enforcement of major legislation concerning sex discrimination in employment. Although this portion of the analysis is limited to the five-year span, 1973-1977, these were years characterized by increasing interest in women's roles. It is likely that if changes occurred they would be reflected during these years. The results, however, indicate general stability in the job attribute preferences of both men and women between 1973 and 1977 (Table 3).

(TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE)

The final analysis examined possible sex differences in commitment to work. This question was explored by asking people if they would continue to work if it was economically unnecessary. The results indicate that most people would continue to do so. However, there are statistically significant sex differences, with 73% of the men and 62% of the women responding that they would continue to work (Table 4). Similar to preferences for job attributes commitment to work is related to other factors, such as education and

occupational prestige. For both men and women, highly educated persons and persons of high occupational prestige are more likely to indicate an interest in continuing to work. However, regardless of educational or occupational prestige level, men remain more likely to work. This sex-related difference in willingness to work appears to be related to marital status. Among unmarried persons there are no significant sex-related differences. However, among married persons men are more likely to indicate that they would continue to work. In addition, unmarried women are significantly more likely to continue working than married women (Table 4). Thus marriage affects women's view of work. In sum, while a majority of all groups regard work as important, married women are less committed to working if economically unnecessary.

(TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE)

CONCLUSION

The results clearly showed that for the job attributes investigated, it is inappropriate to assume a pattern of sex differences in preferences. Men and women appeared to regard the same job attributes as important in their criteria for work. Large differences neither existed for the zero-order relationship, nor did they emerge when education, income, or occupational prestige were controlled. Indeed, when slight but statistically significant sex-related differences did occur, they were in the opposite direction predicted by some previous research. Women,in contrast to men, were slightly more likely to be concerned with meaningful work and slightly less interested in job security. These slight differences could be accounted for by the preferences of married women. In addition, while a majority of

both sexes were committed to their work, a significantly larger percentage of married women were less likely to continue working if it was financially unnecessary. Finally, the preferences for job attributes of both men and women remained relatively unchanged between 1973 and 1977.

Some qualifications of this study need to be explored. Several of the more serious limitations of previous studies have been addressed by utilizing a large representative national sample over a five-year span and by examining a variety of control factors, such as marital status, education, and occupational prestige. However, the array of job attributes in this study was limited to just five, only one of which could be considered an intrinsic attribute. Some of the discrepancies with other studies may be a function of the nature of the attributes selected for examination and the way in which they were measured. However, the attributes do not appear to be particularly different from previous studies and do include those on which sex differences traditionally have been reported. Secondly, the time span for this study may not have been sufficient to assess longitudinal changes. However, the results of this study are consistent with Jurgensen's (1978) study of a 30-year time period. Jurgensen concluded that although differences were found during the 30-year time period such differences were far less than expected and stability was far greater.

A number of implications for future research and practice may be drawn from this study. The utilization of sex-role socialization as the theoretical explanation for sex differences in preferences for job attributes needs to be reexamined. Socialization is a life-long process continuing as the individual enters adult work roles and experiences common job training with other males and females. Men and women are socialized to value particular job criteria. These normative expectations are likely to

be shared by both men and women in similar structural or situational contexts. Miller et al. (1979) for example concluded that the psychological effects of occupational conditions for women are substantial and generally similar to the effects for men. Women are not insulated by past experiences from the effects of the conditions of adult life for intellectual and personality development. Therefore, men and women similar in educational background, occupational opportunities, work contexts and marital situations are more likely to share similar values,motivations and personality development such as preferences for job attributes and commitment to work. Socialization must be viewed as a life-long process to be an effective framework for studying male and female responses to work.

Second, this study concludes that men and women similarly value various attributes of a job. Previous research and reports(Smith, 1979) imply that women are less likely to obtain these attributes in a job. The possible effect and impact of these apparent discrepancies for the workers and organizations require additional research.

Finally, this research suggests that extreme caution should be exercised when making generalizations about sex differences. Various sex-role assumptions and preliminary research findings have been used to justify sex inequalities in the occupational structure. In part, differential work values have been given as reasons for (1) considering certain jobs less appropriate for women (e.g., managerial positions), (2) suggesting differential motivation and reward strategies for males and females, and (3) implying that different types of supervision should be effective for men and women. The findings of this study strongly imply that these assumptions are not warranted.

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TABLE 1. Sex Related Preferences for Job Attributes Controlling for Background Characteristics (Percentages[a])

Background Characteristics	Job Attributes: Meaningfulness Men	Meaningfulness Women	Income Men	Income Women	Promotions Men	Promotions Women	Security Men	Security Women	Working Hours Men	Working Hours Women
Main Effect										
(2691)[b] (3189)[c]	46.2**[d]	53.1	19.6	19.3	19.8**	17.4	9.4**	5.9	4.8	4.2
Income										
≤ $10,000 (994) (1337)	39.2*	45.6	23.6	23.8	21.1	19.8	11.2**	6.5	4.8	4.1
> $10,000 (1544) (1553)	51.1**	60.5	16.8	14.9	19.0**	15.2	8.1**	4.9	4.9	4.4
Education										
High School or < (1704) (2348)	36.9**	47.8	23.6	22.1	21.5	18.7	12.4**	7.0	5.4	4.3
> High School (980) (827)	62.4**	68.3	12.6	11.5	16.7*	13.7	4,2**	2.7	3.9	3.7
Occupational Prestige[e]										
Lower (01-39) (1316) (1519)	35.7**	45.1	24.5	23.9	22.3**	18.7	12.2**	7.0	5.2	5.2
Upper (40-82) (1294) (1207)	57.3**	66.7	14.5	11.7	17.0	14.7	6.6**	3.1	4.5	3.6
Age										
18 - 40 (1248) (1508)	47.3**	53.1	20.0	19.6	20.1*	18.4	7.8**	5.1	4.7	3.7
40 + (1435) (1667)	45.3**	53.0	19.4	18.9	19.5	16.6	10.7**	6.7	4.9	4.7

**Difference between males and females significant $p < .01$.
*Difference between males and females significant $p < .05$.

[a]Percentage selecting the attribute as most important
[b]First number in parentheses under each category represents number of males responding.
[c]Second number in parentheses under each category represents number of females responding.
[d]Significance tests of sex differences based on five categories (1 = most important to 5 = least important)
[e]Coded according to the two digit 1960 Hodge-Siegel-Rossi Prestige Score (01-39 includes sales clerks, cashiers, auto mechanics, 40-82 includes accountants, teachers, managers).

TABLE 2. Sex Related Preferences for Job Attributes by Marital Status (Percentages[a])

Marital Status	Job Attributes: Meaningfulness		Income		Promotions		Security		Working Hours	
	Men	Women[b]	Men	Women[b]	Men	Women	Men	Women[b]	Men	Women
Married (1902)[c] (2111)[d]	46.4**[e]	55.3	19.8	18.3	19.6	16.4	9.6**	5.7	4.5	4.2
Never Married (466) (324)	45.3**	55.2	20.8	14.5	20.8	21.6	7.3	6.2	5.4	2.5
Lost Spouse (323) (754)	46.4	45.8	16.7*	24.3	19.2	18.3	11.1	6.4	6.2	5.0

**Difference between males and females significant $p < .01$.
*Difference between males and females significant $p < .05$.
[a]Percentage selecting the attribute as most important.
[b]Differences among marital status categories of women significant $p < .01$.
[c]First number in parentheses under each category represents number of males responding.
[d]Second number in parentheses under each category represents number of females responding.
[e]Significance tests of sex differences based on five categories (1 = most important to 5 = least important).

TABLE 3. Sex Related Preferences for Job Attributes by Year: 1973-1977 (Percentages)[a]

	Job Attributes Most Preferred				
	Meaningfulness	Income	Promotions	Security	Hours
1973					
Men (697)[b]	48.2*	18.4	19.2	8.2	5.5
Women (800)	54.4	18.6	17.3	5.4	4.0
1974					
Men (675)	45.6*	18.2	20.6	10.4*	5.2
Women (779)	55.7	18.7	15.7	5.3	4.6
1976					
Men (650)	47.7*	21.5	17.4	8.9	4.5
Women (799)	52.3	19.4	18.0	6.6	3.6
1977					
Men (669)	43.3*	20.5	21.8	10.2*	4.2
Women (811)	49.9	20.6	18.5	6.3	4.7

*Differences between males and females significant $p < .01$.
(Significance tests of sex differences based on five categories: 1 = most important to 5 = least important)
[a]Percentage selecting the attribute as most important.
[b]Number in parentheses represents number of respondents.

TABLE 4. Sex Related Differences in Commitment to Work[a] Controlling for Background Characteristics (Percentages)

Background Characteristics	Would Continue To Work: Men	Would Continue To Work: Women
Main Effect	72.6* (1982)[b]	61.9 (1344)
Marital Status		
Married	72.2* (1461)	58.1 (843)
Never Married	76.5 (332)	76.7 (215)
Lost Spouse	68.8 (189)	61.9 (286)
Income		
≤ $10,000	73.4* (552)	61.5 (478)
> $10,000	72.3* (1346)	62.2 (778)
Education		
High School or <	68.3* (1190)	57.3 (874)
> High School	79.1* (786)	70.6 (462)
Occuptional Prestige		
lower (01-39)	70.4* (976)	57.3 (710)
upper (40-87)	75.1* (990)	67.0 (628)
Age		
18 - 40	75.8* (1077)	67.3 (736)
40 +	65.7* (898)	55.5 (602)

*Differences between males and females significant $p < .01$.

[a] Measured by response to the question "If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work or would you stop working?"

[b] Numbers in parentheses represent number of respondents.